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16 February 1949

MEMORANDUM

TO: [REDACTED]
FROM: Dr. J. Merton England
SUBJECT: CIA Historical Program

For the past two and one-half days, I have been examining materials in CIA files on OSS activities during World War II and on those of its predecessor, COI. In particular, I have examined [REDACTED] history of OSS, the War Diaries of the Conyers Read history program, and the History Reference File; in addition, I have made a very cursory survey of the OSS materials in the CIA Archives. These materials contain a great deal of valuable information that would be of current use to CIA. The problem is to determine what types of information are wanted and the best method of finding the data and presenting them in usable manner. It seems to me that this is a historian's job.

A good history of COI, OSS, and CIA would serve two primary needs: (1) a record for posterity, and (2) a guide for CIA's own use in its current operations and in its planning for future activities. As a historian myself, I must emphasize the desirability of keeping both of these needs in mind, not just the second. There is an obligation to the public that a sound, objective, and interpretive history be written, even though publication may be long deferred. Such a history should not be an official history in the normal sense of the term—that is, one that is a defense or eulogy of the organization for which it was prepared.

The second aim mentioned above seems to me even more significant. There should be prepared a record of the experience of OSS that describes and analyzes such things as these: the organization and administration of the agency in the Zone of the Interior and in the theaters of operation; recruitment, classification, assignment, training, and assessment of personnel; development, procurement, supply, shipping, and warehousing of equipment; collection, processing, evaluation, and dissemination of intelligence and other information; strategic, operational, and post-hostilities planning; security; and such specific field operations as penetration and infiltration, propaganda techniques, sabotage, espionage and counter-espionage, use of guerrillas, and escape and exfiltration. There are many other subjects, of course, that should be studied, either as aspects of those suggested here or in their own right.

The existing manuscript history of OSS prepared by [REDACTED] is not an adequate record for either of the aims stated above. That comment is not meant to be disparaging. The history has many virtues, particularly as an over-all history of the organization,

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but it had to be done much too hastily. It is for the most part an "administrative" history written in terms of the changing and expanding organization. Occasional excellent examples of operational techniques are described, but there is not enough description and interpretive analysis of specific functions of OSS. Also, there is too little assessment of reasons for success or failure. Apparently the history was written in large part from branch and field histories that said much about accomplishments but slighted shortcomings.

The mass of documentation on OSS activities in the Archives and in other depositories in Washington means that preparation of such historical studies as those suggested above is more than a one-man job. Fortunately, however, much of the raw material for a history has been assembled and to some degree digested in the War Histories and in the History Reference File. Also, other materials in the Archives are fairly well indexed on reference cards. Perhaps most important of all, [redacted] seems to be quite familiar with the files of the Archives, what office files have been transferred elsewhere, what materials are still in offices, and what materials have been destroyed. She has been most co-operative in my hasty survey, and she could give historian great assistance. 25X1A

As to the selection of historians for the job, effort should be made to choose people who have had experience in war-history projects (preferably in Washington, I think) and who are not bound by meticulous, graduate-school canons that might cause them to bury themselves in minutiae. They must be able to cut through detail, to see beyond organization charts to essential functions, and to write clearly and concisely, using examples as illustrations not as ends in themselves. They should be given the strongest administrative support to gain access to needed materials and freedom to interpret their findings. They should be made to feel that CIA is not wanting a defensive account, that it wants to know what mistakes have been made and how those might have been corrected. To this end they should attempt to evaluate OSS organization, personnel, training, equipment and intelligence in the light of field operations. (Criticisms of training, equipment, etc. made by operational groups in the field provide much of the kind of information needed, though of course, such criticisms themselves need to be evaluated. Also if CIA has access to captured Gestapo and Abwehr files, its historians should be able to learn much from them about the effectiveness of OSS field operations.)

As to the size of historical organization that is needed, the number of studies desired by CIA and the speed with which they should be produced are probably the determining factors. As I see the job, however, it should not require a large organization—perhaps four or five well-qualified men. A good historian should be hired as soon as possible, to make a more intensive survey of the materials, outline the studies that are needed and set up a priority on these on the basis of need, and suggest and examine other prospective historians. Most of the best-qualified historians are now back in academic posts and are probably unwilling to leave, unless compensation is compellingly attractive. It is likely, however, that several academic historians would be willing to work for CIA in the summer months, and others might be able to obtain a full year's leave from

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their institutions. After the completion of the projected program - perhaps a two-year project - there should be at least one permanent historian to keep a running record and make special studies.

It might be desirable for CIA to have one or two outstanding historians to serve as advisers on the establishment of a historical program and on recruitment of personnel. One man who could give invaluable aid is Mr. Henry F. Pringle. The other historical agencies in Washington, too, would probably be willing to give advice and aid. Mr. Kent Roberts Greenfield who is in charge of the Army Historical program, and Mr. Albert F. Simpson, the civilian in charge of the Air Force program, I am sure would be co-operative, and the chance to profit from their extensive experience should not be passed by.

As to the kind of history needed, that is a matter for determination by CIA and its historians. I would hesitate to blueprint the studies that should be made though I think that monographs would be more useful than an over-all history. Even when a program of studies is decided upon, it should be kept flexible. Actual research in the available materials is necessary before final determination that a projected study is feasible.

Deadlines for the completion of studies should also be flexible. Historians are notoriously optimistic in their estimation of the amount of time needed to complete a given study. It is best to expect that it will take at least twice as long as they first anticipate. But a deadline does serve a useful purpose if used as a target date rather than a bludgeon. And if a historian constantly runs far behind schedule and does not come up with a study that merits the extensions of time given him, it is best to be hard-hearted and turn him loose.

Historians should be as close to their materials as possible. The Archives are already crowded, and it may be necessary to work out a system of charging out materials to the users. But by all means keep the archivists happy; they are potentially the historians' best friends or their worst enemies. Perhaps a room or two in the Administration Building could be made available to the historians so that documents could be returned to the Archives on the day they are checked out.

A well-managed, productive historical program can best be achieved with a few competent people. Careful planning in advance will save many headaches later on. But it is vital that a history, or at least several historical studies, be prepared soon. Much has already been done toward that end, and it would be tragic if the record of success and failure, and the reasons for success and failure, are not drawn from the existing material.

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IDENTIFICATION OF DOCUMENT

Memo from Dr. J. Merton England [Professor of History, University of Kentucky]. Subject: CIA Historical Program transmitted under cover of memo from [REDACTED] Sub: OPC Evaluation of OSS Archives. 25X1A

ABSTRACT NOTATION REFERENCES

Dr. England's memo explains what he feels should be the objective of a comprehensive history of COI-OSS and makes general recommendation for carrying out such a program.

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